

1st Sunday of Lent, Year A

GOSPEL

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Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.' But he replied, 'Scripture says:

*Man does not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God' he said 'throw yourself down; for scripture says:

*He will put you in his angels' charge,
and they will support you on their hands
in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'*

Jesus said to him, 'Scripture also says:

You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. 'I will give you all these' he said, 'if you fall at my feet and worship me.' Then Jesus replied, 'Be off, Satan! For scripture says:

*You must worship the Lord your God,
and serve him alone.'*

Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him.

(Matthew 4:1-11)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Lent is a forty-day period of special preparation for Easter. During this time, the whole Church puts extra effort into three aspects of the life of faith: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.
- There is evidence of Lenten preparation for Easter very early in the Church's history, but its practices became more regularised after the Council of Nicaea (325).
- In years gone by, Catholics did not eat meat on any Friday and, later, on Fridays in Lent. Today there are two days of the year when Catholics are expected to forgo meat—Ash Wednesday and Good Friday—but all the Fridays of Lent are still days when we should 'fast'.
- The beginning of Lent marks a special time in the preparation of catechumens for baptism. The long period of formation and growth is ended and catechumens have their names entered in church records in a special celebration known as the Rite of Enrolment of Names or the Rite of Election. The next few weeks of intense preparation are known as the Period of Purification and Enlightenment. Catechumens are now known as 'the elect'.

EXPLORING THE WORD

This text follows immediately from the baptism of Jesus. The final words of that text come from the voice from heaven: 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.' It is interesting that Satan uses the words 'If you are the Son of God...' to introduce two of his temptations. In this way, Satan is disputing the claim from heaven and trying to force Jesus to prove his sonship. In response to the first temptation, Jesus affirms his trust in God. Satan seizes on this as the basis for his second temptation, but again Jesus rejects any attempt to force God's hand. The final temptation reveals the true nature of the contest—it is a struggle between God and Satan—but Jesus shows his choice is made and rejects Satan.

- Do you reject Satan and all his works? This will be a question asked at baptism. In what ways are we called to reject self-interest, power and physical comfort as followers of Jesus?
- What are some of the choices between 'good and evil' that we face in our own everyday existence?
- There is much evil in our world today. Draw parallels with this text. Discuss ways in which Christians are called to respond to particular modern phenomena like consumerism or individualism. In what way is this a personal testing for us?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- What are the temptations you experience?
- How is the balance in your life? How much energy do you expend in looking after your physical and material domain as opposed to your mental and spiritual domain?
- Have there been periods or events in your life that tested you? What did you learn of your own strengths and weaknesses from this? Share your reflections.
- Make a commitment to your own special regime of prayer, fasting and almsgiving during this Lenten period. Find out about and give support to Project Compassion.
- Use this verse from this week's psalm as your prayer:

*A pure heart create for me, O God,
put a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
nor deprive me of your holy spirit.*

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

The Lent–Easter–Pentecost cycle should be seen as a unified whole. Among the earliest of the feasts that were celebrated by the early church were Easter and Pentecost. The preparatory season of Lent was added later as a final period of intense preparation for those catechumens seeking baptism. It was also the final period of penance for those who had sinned before they were received back to the Eucharist.

- Reflect on the ceremonies of Ash Wednesday and especially the Rite of Election. What do they mean?
- Explain the significance of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment in the rite.
- What is the meaning of *penance*? Discuss appropriate expressions of ‘penance’ during Lent, including the possibility of ‘taking on’ rather than ‘giving up’.

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

In this text, Matthew continues his depiction of Jesus as the new Moses. The forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness recall the forty years during which Israel wandered the desert and the forty days that Moses spent on the mountain.

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- What special Lenten preparations or programs are being held in your parish? Are there ways that the elect can become involved?
- Try to evoke the wilderness with a bowl of sand and a simple twig cross as the focus for prayer. Pray for each other as you journey through this final phase towards baptism. A suitable song could be 'My soul is thirsting' (GA 37). Conclude with the prayer of exorcism in the RCIA at §94F.

NOTES